

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CARACA 01819 221512Z

ACTION ARA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, VE

SUBJECT: FURTHER VENEZUELAN REACTION TO NEW YORK

TIMES STORY ACCUSING PRESIDENT PEREZ OF
RECEIVING MONEY FROM THE CIA.

REF: CARACAS 1806

SUMMARY. PRESS AND MEDIA ON FEBRUARY 22 CONTINUE TO REPORT
EXPRESSIONS OF SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT PEREZ AND THRUST OF
NATIONAL REACTION CONTINUES TO BE THAT IT IS USG RESPONSIBILITY
TO ABSOLVE PEREZ OF ACCUSATIONS.

1. PRESIDENT PEREZ ON FEBRUARY 21 MADE ANOTHER TOUGH STATEMENT
TO THE PRESS CONCERNING THE NEW YORK TIMES STORY. AS IN HIS
STATEMENT OF FEBRUARY 20 (SEE REF), THE PRESIDENT STATED THAT
THE STORY WAS "MORAL AGGRESSION" AGAINST VENEZUELA WHOSE DIGNITY
HAD BEEN AFFRONTED. HE ADDED THAT IT IS THE "OBLIGATION OF THE
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT TO TAKE THIS SITUATION TO ITS ULTIMATE
CONSEQUENCES." PEREZ ALSO DESCRIBED STORY AS "ANOTHER WATERGATE"
AND A "DEFINITIVE TEST FOR PRESIDENT CARTER TO DEMONSTRATE HIS
GOOD INTENTIONS." AFTER REITERATING HIS EARLIER CONDEMNATION
OF THE CIA, HE DESCRIBED IT AS "THAT OFFICIAL U.S.
ORGANIZATION THAT RESEMBLES MORE A GANG OF GUNSLINGERS THAN
AN ORGANIZATION THAT LOOKS AFTER THE SECURITY OF THAT GREAT
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PAGE 02 CARACA 01819 221512Z

NATION WITH THE DIGNITY AND DECORUM WHICH THAT GREAT NATION
SHOULD GIVE TO ITS ACTIONS." PEREZ ALSO STATED HE HAD IN-
STRUCTED THE FOREIGN MINISTER TO PRESENT THE MATTER IN A
"CLEAR AND FRIENDLY WAY" TO THE U.S. AMBASSADOR AND REQUEST AN
EXPLANATION OF HIS GOVERNMENT "CLARIFYING THIS MENDACIOUS,
SLANDEROUS AND INFAMOUS ACCUSATION" WHICH ATTEMPTS TO "MORALLY
DISQUALIFY THE PRESIDENT OF THE VENEZUELAN." HE REPEATED

THAT HE IS AWAITING THE REPLY OF THE USG TO BE GIVEN "TO VENEZUELA AND TO WORLD OPINION..." "BECAUSE A PRESIDENT OF AN AUTHENTICALLY DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC SUCH AS VENEZUELA HAS TO BE ABOVE SUSPICION AS FAR AS HIS MORAL INTEGRITY AND DECORUM ARE CONCERNED."

2. NEWSPAPERS ALSO REPORT ARRIVAL OF VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON, IRIBARREN, WHO HAD BEEN SUMMONED TO CARACAS URGENTLY. IN ANSWER TO PRESS QUERIES, IRIBARREN EXPRESSED HIS CONFIDENCE THAT THE USG WOULD EXPLAIN WHAT HAS HAPPENED "IN A MANNER SATISFACTORY FOR OUR COUNTRY AND FOR THE DIGNITY OF VENEZUELA."

3. PRESS ALSO REPORTS CONTINUED STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT PEREZ ON THE PART OF POLITICAL PARTIES, TRADE UNIONS, PEASANT CONFEDERATIONS AND THE NATIONAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE (FEDECAMARAS). ADMIRAL WOLFGANG LARRAZABAL, HEAD OF THE JUNTA THAT REPLACED DICTATOR PEREZ HIMENEZ IN 1958, ALSO ISSUED A WRITTEN STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF PRESIDENT PEREZ. COPEI, MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY, MEETS FEBRUARY 23 TO DECIDE ON ITS OFFICIAL POSITION ON THE MATTER.

4. COMMENT: UNQUALIFIED SUPPORT FOR PRESIDENT PEREZ CONTINUES TO MOUNT AND PUBLIC OPINION UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTS IDEA THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEW YORK TIMES STORY LIES WITH USG AND THAT IT IS UP TO USG TO CLEAR PEREZ AND VENEZUELAN DIGNITY.

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